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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 000753

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/15/2012

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SUBJECT: MAOIST LEADERS ARRESTED IN KATHMANDU

REF: KATHMANDU 632

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski, Reasons 1.5(b),(d)

1. (C) Summary. At least two important Maoist leaders have been detained by security forces in recent days, police sources told us. Leading female cadre Rekha Sharma and her husband were picked up in Kathmandu April 13. The Inspector General of Police (IGP) confirmed the arrests April 16, but Army top brass declined to comment. The arrests are a boost to the government's efforts to counter the Maoists. End Summary.

Two Maoists Apprehended in Capital

2. (SBU) A Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) operation reportedly apprehended two Maoist leaders, Rekha Sharma and Krishna Dhoj Khadka, from their rented room in Kathmandu's Dallu neighborhood April 13. Rekha is president of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) and member of the Maoist "Central People's Government," while Khadka, her husband, was formerly president of the All Nepal National Independent Students' Union (Revolutionary). Reportedly, Khadka had been detained briefly in November, 2001, but had escaped.

IGP Confirms; No Comment from Top Army Brass

3. (C) Local press reported the arrests April 16, and low-level police personnel confirmed these reports to Post. Then at an afternoon reception the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Rana confirmed the arrests to Ambassador. One ranking army officer refused comment when contacted by DATT, adding that the news of the arrest had not yet been officially released.

Nepal's Most Wanted

4. (C) A photograph of Rekha Sharma - along with pictures of other Maoist leaders - was broadcast on local television last week with an appeal to provide authorities with information on her whereabouts. Sources also told Post that Maoist Central Committee member Muma Ram Khanal was picked up by security forces in early April. Khanal's arrest has not been confirmed. IGP Rana told the Ambassador that recently another Maoist Central Committee member, Ajab Lal Yadav, was killed in an encounter with police. (Note: According to press reports quoting an official announcement, Yadav was killed March 22 during a search operation in southeastern Nepal's Saptari district. Yadav had been in police custody last year, but was released October 16, 2001 in response to a demand put forth by the Maoists in their second round of talks with government representatives. End Note.)

Comment

5. (C) Whether the result of "America's Most Wanted"-style public participation or the security forces' own resourcefulness, the arrests have given a boost to the government's efforts to counter the Maoists. In recent weeks the Maoists have conducted increasingly daring operations in the Kathmandu valley - including setting off a bomb on a bridge in broad daylight (Reftel). Bringing in the apparent leaders of this campaign should help bottle it up, and at the same time improve public perceptions of the government's handling of the crisis.

MALINOWSKI